CLAIMS

1.   A method of collecting product data, comprising the steps of:

generating a profile identifying a given site URL,

5   an item to be queried, and a scan interval;

on a periodic basis as defined by the scan interval, retrieving data from the given site URL; and

parsing the retrieved data according to a site template to generate a data record comprising an item

10   name and an associated price value.

2.   The method as described in Claim 1 further including the step of storing the data record.

15   3.   The method as described in Claim 1 further including the step of:

comparing the associated price data to a given threshold condition; and

taking a given action if the price data has a given

20   relationship to the given threshold condition.

4.   The method as described in Claim 3 wherein the given action is selected from the actions consisting

essentially of issuing an e-mail notification, logging an event, and initiating an e-commerce transaction.

5. The method as described in Claim **1** further

5 including the step of collecting associated price data

for the item name over a given period of time to produce

historical price data.

6. The method as described in Claim **1** wherein the

10 includes matching criteria that must be met for the item

name.

7. The method as described in Claim **6** wherein the

matching criteria is an exact match.

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8. The method as described in Claim **6** wherein the

matching criteria is a fuzzy match.

9. The method as described in Claim **1** wherein the

20 data record also includes secondary source information.

10. A method of collecting product data, comprising the steps of:

generating a set of product profiles, each identifying a given site URL, a list of one or more

5 included items to be queried, a scan interval, and a site template;

for a given product profile, periodically retrieving data from the given site URL according to the scan interval;

10 parsing the data retrieved from the given site URL according to the site template to generate a data record for each included item comprising an item name, an associated price value, and a secondary source; and

storing the data records.

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11. The method as described in Claim 10 wherein the given product profile also includes a list of excluded items.

20 12. The method as described in Claim 10 wherein the given product profile also includes a next scan date.

13.   The method as described in Claim **12** wherein the given product profile also includes a threshold expression comprising a set of one or more triggers.

5   14.   The method as described in Claim **13** wherein the given product profile also includes a threshold action that is triggered if the threshold expression resolves to a given value.

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15. A computer program product having a set of instructions executable by a processor for use in a client computer for collecting product data according to the following method steps:

5   generating a set of product profiles each identifying a given site URL, a list of one or more included items to be queried, a scan interval, and a site template;

for a given product profile, periodically retrieving

10   data from the given site URL according to the scan interval; and

parsing the data retrieved from the given site URL according to the site template to generate a data record for each included item comprising at least an item name

15   and an associated price value.

16. A computer program product in a computer-
useable medium, comprising:

code for generating a profile identifying a given
site URL, at least one item to be queried, a scan

5   interval, and a site template;

code for retrieving data from the given site URL at
the scan interval; and

code for parsing the retrieved data according to the
site template to generate a data record comprising an

10   item name and an associated price value.

17.   A database for use in managing a pricing agent in a computer, comprising:

a pricing profile table comprising a set of profile records, each record identifying a URL site, a list of

5   included items, a scan interval, and a pointer to a site template;

a site template table comprising a set of site templates, each site template comprising lexical instructions for parsing a data stream to identify given

10 data;

a price table comprising a set of pricing records, each record identifying an item name, an associated price value, and at least one source.

15   18.   The database as described in Claim 17 further including a threshold table comprising a set of threshold records, each record identifying a threshold type, a threshold value, and a threshold comparison operator.

20   19.   The database as described in Claim 17 wherein each profile record further includes a list of excluded items.

20. A computer, comprising:

a browser;

a database comprising:

a pricing profile table comprising a set of

5   profile records, each record identifying a URL site,

a list of included items, a scan interval, and a

pointer to a site template;

a site template table comprising a set of site

templates, each site template comprising lexical

10   instructions for parsing a data stream to identify

given data; and

a price table comprising a set of pricing

records, each record identifying an item name, an

associated price value, and at least one source; and

15   code executable in the browser during processing of

a given pricing profile record at the scan interval for

parsing data retrieved from the URL site according to the

site template to generate a data record for each included

item.

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